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An MHSAA Commentary By Communications Director John Johnson: A Battle Between Number 1 & Number 2 – Yeah, Right

A supposed gridiron clash of champions, pitting the so-called top two teams nationally in high school football, took place a few weeks ago, replete with a marketing firm and a national cable television channel at the controls.

This manufactured matchup of one versus two, according to the USA Today -- the publication which says its national rankings were never intended to lead high school sports down the road to ruin, but yet it needs to report the issues and trends surrounding high school sports – comes on the heels of a national-level event in Ohio bringing in teams from both coasts and many points in-between, again run by non-school interests who do not have the best interests of educational athletics at heart.

The only education that takes place here is an education in excess – the exact problem that major college sports programs created for themselves with excessive travel and marketing.

There is nothing constructive about trying to create national programs and national travel for high school sports. In fact, it would be more corruptive and destructive than anything else, as the pressure would mount unnecessarily on all parties involved and ultimately lead to increased cheating, even more undue adulation of coaches and student-athletes (and thus the pressure on them to win), and deemphasize what's truly important about educational athletics – education.

This type of promotion of high school sports does little, if anything, to promote the good things happening in our programs. It's more about showcasing tomorrow's top college recruits than anything else. It's the one percent factor again. People placing an emphasis on elite players and teams and forcing that one percent down our throats rather than celebrating the fact that 99 percent of our high school participants are the real story – they're the ones reaping the true benefits of their participation in educational athletics.

Schools in Michigan, for the most part, get it when it comes to what the mission is of after school activities like sports. They get the fact that they come after the school day on the clock, and they come after school work in the order of what's important. They decided some time ago, and continue to believe that national travel, national exposure and national tournaments have no place in programs which are local in nature.

(more)

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And so to those in the national sports media and marketing circles who are doing more to exploit high school sports than promote it; and to those who believe – including a few high school coaches and administrators – that national exposure is good for our local games; I say this: educational athletics are local, they do the most good for kids and communities when they keep their local focus, and what you're doing is nothing more than satisfying some sports fan's college recruiting fix and trying to create the same out-of-control monster that casts a dark shadow over another group that used to call themselves educational athletics.

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NOTE – This commentary is also this week's edition of the audio program MHSAA Perspective, which can be heard on over 30 radio stations across the state, and on the MHSAA Internet Broadcast Network – www.mhsaanetwork.com.

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